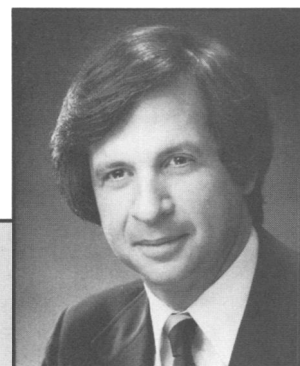


ARIZONA MEDICINE

MAY 1987, VOL. XLIV, NO. 5

The "Real" World



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While looking for a "good used car" for my daughter, we stopped at an automobile dealership known for its integrity. After duly kicking tires, we found a vehicle we both liked. As the salesman was doing whatever they do with their "managers," I found the original owner's name in the glove compartment and phoned her while we waited. Although we were assured the car was never in an accident, had never been repainted ("original paint"), and was in perfect mechanical shape, the former owner told us just the opposite, i.e., the car had two accidents, front and back, was painted at least twice, and had a major oil leak, the origin of which was never found. When confronted with this information the salesman feigned total surprise and disbelief, and vowed to remove the car from the lot and "wholesale it." The next day I decided to call the dealership and ask about the vehicle. By chance, the same salesman answered the phone but he obviously didn't recognize my voice. "I saw a car on your lot last night that I liked and I was wondering what kind of condition it was in," I asked. He answered, "It's never been in an accident, mechanically it's perfect, and it

has its original paint." Such a lesson for a 17-year-old girl to learn! Had it come from my lips or from her schoolteachers or her religious advisers, I don't think she would have believed us. She learned about the real world from a used car salesman!

We, on the other hand, as physicians, live in a dream world. Our daily lives revolve around our chosen profession. For most of us, we enjoy and get a great deal of satisfaction doing what we do "for a living." We get up and feel clean, shower and look clean, we enter a clean work environment whether in our office or in the hospital. We don a white coat (or pastel color) or clean surgical garb. We interact and interview our patients in an upfront, honest fashion. For the most part our conversations with our patients are honest, truthful and above-board. Our patients come to us for help and we reciprocate the best we can. We don't have to deceive, lie or con them. We just have to be compassionate and honest. They in turn deal with us, for the most part, honestly. They don't withhold information if they are seeking our help. For some it might take a bit of time to get it all out, but it does eventually come out. We furthermore serve on com-

mittees at hospitals and in professional and civic organizations. We arrive on time, we give it our best when asked to perform or give an opinion whether it's private or in a public forum. We have been raised as responsible persons to do what is right and what is intellectually honest. The scientific method plus the wisdom of the Judaic-Christian religions have been melded to give us a code of ethics which we all follow whether we realize it or not. When we don't, we feel guilty. Sometimes the guilt is overwhelming, for our aspirations are higher than our attained goals. For some of us this leads to behavior which is socially unacceptable and self-destructive, i.e., alcohol abuse, drug abuse, and even suicide. Thankfully, most of us can survive the demands of our profession and prosper. But, when the pressures build or when our sleep is interrupted by a call from the hospital or a disgruntled patient phones, remember what it must be like to be a used car salesman in the "real world" and be thankful for our role in the scheme of things. We are in a unique profession. ■

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